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“Talking Frankly” about David Irving

A Critical Analysis of David Irving's Statement on the Holocaust

By Hadding Scott

Published: 2016-05-24

The following article is a critical analysis of some statements made by British historian David Irving in a “privately filmed interview” of April 2009 lasting over 2 hours, and entitled, “Talking Frankly.” Until early 2016, this interview was available only on DVD. It was posted on YouTube in March 2016. It can also be watched here:

I first became aware of David Irving about 1992 during the period (1988 – 1995) when he acquired the reputation of being a “notorious Holocaust Denier.” The David Irving of that time was an inspiring figure. He espoused the idealism of pursuing truth rather than profit. He was a fearless iconoclast. The fact that he was already a celebrity historian (for example having been discussed in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five* as the author of the book about Dresden, and having appeared on Leonard Nimoy’s *In Search Of* as an expert on Eva Braun) made his stand for the cause of Holocaust Revisionism all the more impressive. This was a man who had status and something to lose, who was nonetheless championing the most controversial of truths. The persona that David Irving projected in that period resonated with my own ideals and encouraged me to live up to them.

After his testimony for Ernst Zündel in1988, David Irving seemed to be an intellectual hero in full self-actualization. He said in a 1988 speech that he knew that he had “joined the ranks of the damned” and that the next five to ten years would be difficult, but that he would persevere. David Irving’s stand for Holocaust Revisionism seemed to be an expression of his long-evident character as the historian who intended to correct the omissions and distortions of victors’ history. Holocaust Revisionism seemed to be consistent with the essence of David Irving, the logical next stage in the evolution of the heroic historian.

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But in retrospect, with greater knowledge, one can see that David Irving’s truth-advocacy was never entirely free of hesitation. While David Irving seemed to be an uncompromising truthteller, one can just barely discern the influence of calculated self-interest and the moistened finger in the breeze, even in his most outspokenly controversial period. The seed of retreat was always there.

For example, in that 1988 speech, wherein David Irving proclaims that he is now an “unbeliever” in the Auschwitz gas-chamber story, and that the whole gas-chamber story is likely false, he balks at blaming Jews for the lie. Instead, he claims that British psychological warfare put out the gas-chamber story “quite cold-bloodedly” -- although documents of the British government (visible on Irving’s own site) indicated that the British psychological warfare executive was repeating a story that came to them from Jews. I assume that David Irving learned of all of these documents (unearthed by Paul Norris) at about the same time, whence it follows that David Irving knew, when he said in 1988 that the British had invented the gas-chamber story, that it really came from Jews.

All of this points to a fear of the Jews that was never entirely overcome. Jewish power is, after all, a serious matter for a commercial author who depends on the Jewish-dominated publishing industry for his livelihood.

It seems that David Irving believed that he could minimize conflict with Jews by minimizing Jewish responsibility for the Holocaust-lie. During that 1988 speech, as Irving explains how Jews themselves are supposed victims of the lie, a man in the audience blurts out, “You’re very generous!” In 1988 David Irving was indeed generous in his assessment of the role of Jews in promoting the Holocaust, but that generosity did not save him from Jewish odium and organized Jewish harassment.

In 1996, when *Goebbels: Mastermind of the Third Reich* appeared, it became clear that David Irving was in retreat, and trying to appease his enemies by writing a book that slammed a leading figure in Hitler’s Germany while showing sympathy toward Jews.

I heard a prominent Holocaust Revisionist at that time remark (privately) that David Irving had been accustomed to living the high life as a famous historian who drove a Rolls Royce, and, contrary to his professed idealism and professed willingness to sacrifice in pursuit of truth, David Irving had embraced Holocaust Revisionism with the expectation that it would be the *next big thing* in modern historiography, and that he would benefit from having gotten into it early – not realizing how adversely the Jewish backlash would affect his lifestyle and interfere with his career.

In other words, David Irving was never as idealistic as he professed to be. However impressive, however convincing and inspiring he seemed in the period from 1988 to 1995, David Irving was more heroic tenor than hero. This is clearer than ever today.

During the failed libel-suit against Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin Books in 2000, Irving complained extensively about the pecuniary loss that he had suffered as a result of Jewish propaganda against him as a “Holocaust Denier.” With that suit he was trying to escape the label “Holocaust Denier,” and in 2016 he seems to be still trying.

These days, David Irving actually promotes the proposition that there really was some kind of Holocaust, and, although he has not retracted his endorsement of the *Leuchter Report* (which he himself republished in 1989), on the whole he is not only trying to distance himself from Holocaust Revisionism but indeed working against it.

A big part of the problem with David Irving is the lack of rigor in his reasoning. Because he never bothers to define the term Holocaust, and never specifies how it is supposed to have happened, David Irving is able to say:

> *“How many died in the Holocaust? ... Well the answer is: a lot.”*

It is always an inauspicious beginning to a discussion of the Holocaust when the term is left vague and undefined, because it means that every Jew who died of a disease, and every Jewish criminal who was punished, and even every Jew whose whereabouts were unknown after the war, may be counted as a victim of the Holocaust. Anyone who embarks on such a discussion without defining the term has already decided that the number who died in the Holocaust will be “a lot.”

Most of “Talking Frankly” is autobiographic, but in the final segment David Irving presents

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a revised version of the Holocaust that salvages as much of the genocide-accusation as can be salvaged without contradicting the *Leuchter Report*. There are three main

elements here. The order in which he presents them reflects their importance in retreating from the quasi-heroic stand that he took in 1988. First he makes a partial retreat from his position on Auschwitz; then he asserts that many Jews were killed in the Operation Reinhardt camps; finally, he plays up an alleged mass-shooting of Jews that is supposed to have happened in 1941.

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Author(s)	Hadding Scott
Title	“Talking Frankly” about David Irving, A Critical Analysis of David Irving's Statement on the Holocaust
Sources	David Irving, "Talking Frankly", DVD 2009; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97L_SJrPl6g&list;=PL2OXhVAnYg1DfXZ4RejC6eGKlpgufNmt1
Contributions	n/a
Dates	published: 2016-05-24, first posted on CODOH: May 23, 2016, 9:07 p.m., last revision: n/a
Comments	n/a
Appears In	Holocaust + Final Solution> Aktion Reinhardt Revisionist Personalities> Irving, David
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